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ABSTRACT

The paper is a product of the 3-year project, "Functional Mainstreaming for Success," designed to develop a model for instructional mainstreaming of handicapped children (3-6 years old) in community settings. The paper provides a seven point definition of successful mainstreaming and reviews the literature on the role of special educators in such a mainstreaming program. The new role requires special educators to learn: (1) the rationale and benefits of mainstreaming; (2) methods of promoting mainstreaming; (3) curricula, rules, and social expectations in the receiving classroom; and (4) methods for preparing special education students for mainstreaming. Special educators need preparation for mainstreaming in four areas: knowledge of mainstreaming, personal support, public relations, and functional curriculum training. Noted is a tendency of special educators to feel protective toward their students leading to a reluctance to mainstream or equitably distribute children across all potential receiving teachers. Among changes needed are the following: training and administrative support, incorporation of special and regular education into an integrated total educational system, and recognition of mainstreaming as an ongoing process in the education of handicapped children. (DB)

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Mainstreaming: A New Role for the Special Educator

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Running Head: Special Educator Role

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Abstract

The process of mainstreaming requires changes in the role of the special educator. The new role requires special educators to learn at minimum: (a) the rationale and benefits of mainstreaming, (b) methods of promoting mainstreaming, (c) curricula, rules, and social expectations in receiving classrooms, and (d) methods for preparing special education students for mainstreaming. Additionally, special educators may feel a protectiveness toward their students which may result in a reluctance to mainstream or to equitably distribute children across all potential receiving teachers. It is important for school administrators to recognize and address the changes that mainstreaming imposes upon the special educator.

"Mainstreaming: A New Role for the Special Educator

A major goal of mainstreaming is to allow children with handicaps to experience the demands, as well as the day-to-day pleasures, of the world beyond the segregated, self-contained classroom and to learn from that experience. In order to achieve this goal, mainstreaming must be defined and implemented as a continuing process, rather than as a discrete event. It must include the physical, instructional and social integration of children who have handicaps into educational and community environments with children who do not have handicaps. Furthermore, successful mainstreaming must:

1. Be based on the decision of the IEP team that a child can potentially benefit from placement with children who are not handicapped;

2. Provide a continuum of least restrictive placement options which range from brief periods of limited interactions, to full-time participation in the regular classroom;

3. Specify the responsibility of students, parents, regular and special education teachers, administrators, and support personnel;

4. Include pre-placement preparation, post-placement support, and continued training for students with and without handicaps, their parents, teachers, administrators, and support personnel;

5. Maximize appropriate interactions between children with and without handicaps through structured activities (such as peer tutoring or buddy systems) and social skills training, as appropriate to specific situations and abilities;

6. Provide functional, age-appropriate activities that prepare the child with handicaps to function in current and future community environments; and

7. Occur without major long-term disruption of ongoing educational activities or other detriments to children with and without handicaps in the mainstream setting. (Striefel, Killoran, Quintero & Adams, 1985).

Roles

Mainstreaming, thus defined, requires the preparation of all participants in the process. The emphasis of this preparation, support, and assistance is usually focused upon the regular educator who receives the child, (Crisci, 1981; Masat & Schack, 1981; Saunders & Burch, 1982; Sharp, 1982; Yanito, Quintero, Killoran, & Striefel, 1985). These efforts are well-directed, since they are aimed at creating a receptive learning environment for the mainstreamed child.

However, preparation for mainstreaming should not target the regular educator alone. It must also include the preparation of the special educator who must promote mainstreaming not only among fellow educators, but frequently among hesitant administrators. Furthermore, it is often assumed that the special educator is a whole-hearted supporter of mainstreaming, when in fact, this may not always be true (Hughes & Hurth, 1984; Turnbull & Winston, 1983). The special educator has mainstreaming preparation needs that are too frequently overlooked. This preparation must address knowledge deficits, emotional support needs, improved public relations and communication skills, and broader curriculum training. Additionally, the special educator is often the sole organizer, implementor, and evaluator of mainstreaming in a school, in addition to serving as a child advocate. These roles can result in conflicts with other teachers and administrators (Milner & Beane, 1983). Finally, administrative responsibility for mainstreaming is often conferred upon the special educator, without the administration's support for implementing necessary procedures. Without such recognition, as well as tact and social skills to encourage colleagues, the special educator's efforts can further alienate regular educators, and increase disagreements about mainstreaming from the outset.

Preparing the Special Educator for Mainstreaming

Special educators require preparation for mainstreaming in four major areas: knowledge of mainstreaming, personal support,

public relations, and functional curriculum training. Each area will be discussed individually.

Knowledge Needs

It is usually the special educator who is asked by regular educators to justify why students in special education are mainstreamed. If the special educator is unsure about the purpose of mainstreaming students, it is unlikely that other educators will come to understand the need for students with handicaps to be educated in a least restrictive environment. The special educator must be able to communicate that education with normal peers affords opportunities for the handicapped child to: (a) learn to behave appropriately by observing other students (Odom, Deklyen, & Jenkins, 1984); (b) learn age-appropriate patterns of language and communication by listening and participating in a complex, demanding environment (Odom, et al, 1984; Zigmond & Sansone, 1981); (c) have opportunities to practice or generalize skills which are learned in the special education classroom (Odom, et al. 1984; Pasanella & Volkmor, 1982); (d) learn and use appropriate social skills (Odom, et al, 1984; Price & Weinberg, 1982); and (e) learn to function in the community (Becker, 1983).

Additionally, it is helpful for the special educator to know and communicate that nonhandicapped students are not disadvantaged by mainstreaming, when the process is implemented with foresight and careful planning (Adams, Quintero, Striefel, & Frede,1985; Walker, 1983). Finally, in mainstreamed early childhood programs

where peers assume some responsibility (e.g. helping the child get his coat off) for the student of lesser ability, more mature behaviors and fewer discipline problems are observed among nonhandicapped peers (Price & Weinberg, 1982).

A second knowledge need area stems from the general lack of systematic procedures that are available for mainstreaming (Striefel & Killoran, 1984). Without examples of successful, well-planned mainstreaming efforts, regular and special educators have no models to follow. Input and commitment from administrators in outlining this process for a school or agency is critical (Pasanella & Volkmor, 1981; Taylor, 1982). A well-outlined plan for mainstreaming provides guidelines to follow which the special educator can also use as an educational guide for regular education colleagues.

The special educator needs precise information about mainstreaming if other educators within a school are to become knowledgeable supporters of mainstreaming. Unfortunately, pre-service programs in special education do not address mainstreaming in detail (Adams et al., 1985 Hughes & Hurth, 1984); therefore, few special educators can be expected to have adequate knowledge about mainstreaming when they enter the field of education. It may rest upon directors of regular and special education to plan and implement this training with teachers in the field.

Personal Support Needs

The special education student often remains in special education with the same teacher for years. Over time, the teacher and the student form a bond which can promote student dependency upon the teacher, and can also lead to overprotection of the student by the teacher (Hughes & Hurth, 1984). As a result, special educators can experience ambivalent feelings about mainstreaming their students. This situation is compounded by the isolation from peers which special educators themselves feel in a public school (Haight, 1984; Hughes & Hurth, 1984). It is important that administrators, specialists, and colleagues recognize overprotective behavior, and involve the target teacher in team decisions where concerns can be voiced and addressed, while still advancing the student's progress into mainstream activities.

Extensive planning and preparation need to occur before attempting to mainstream a child (Striefel, Killoran, & Quintero, 1986), the focus here is on the preparation of the special educator. A gradual transition of a student from the special education classroom to a mainstream placement (e.g., ten minutes a day) may help all of the teachers (regular and special educators) to observe the child's progress and gain confidence in the new program.

Another thrust of personal support efforts must address the concern of special educators that by mainstreaming students out of

their classes, they may be reducing the need for special education and, for special educators. This concern emphasizes the need for a change in the role of the special educator. As children leave the special education class, the role of the special educator must expand from one of direct service provider, to one which includes being an educational consultant, who provides a receiving teacher with ideas, training, and support to successfully cope with a child's limitations (Hughes & Hurth, 1984; Pasanella & Volkmor, 1981). The special educator who is unwilling to assume this role may, in fact, be facing a serious employment dilemma. Conversely, the special educator who accepts this shift in responsibilities may need training in adult management in order to become a skillful consultant.

Public Relations Issues

The special educator is often the individual who "sells" the idea of mainstreaming to administrators, parents, and to other teachers. In attempting to do so, however, the special educator is often faced with four major obstacles in the education system: (a) the regular educator's lack of familiarity with the education of students with handicaps; b) the excuse that a child cannot be mainstreamed because the receiving classroom is overcrowded with nonhandicapped students; (c) administrators who delegate the responsibility for mainstreaming to the special educator without conferring the needed authority and; (d) parents (of children with handicaps) who are opposed to having their child

mainstreamed or parents (of normal children) who do not want children who have handicaps in their child's class. These obstacles will be discussed individually.

"But I don't know what to do". Regular education teachers often report that they are not trained to teach students with handicaps (Adams, et. al., 1985; Crisci, 1981; Hannah & Pilner, 1983). While it is true that special education was created to meet the needs of students who demand more time to learn and who may need adaptations of existing curricula to learn specific skills, a review of the literature on teacher competencies for mainstreaming determined that only 4 competency areas were specific to the needs of mainstreamed students (Adams, et al., 1985). These areas addressed: knowledge of handicapping conditions, knowledge about the process and rationale of mainstreaming, legal issues related to mainstreaming, and preparation of a class for mainstreaming. The other 19 competency areas were necessary for effective teaching of all students, and required only minimal, child-specific training or consultation for successful mainstreaming. These findings are supported by Gardner (1977), who stated that methods used to teach regular and special education students are not unique for either group. In stating this position, the authors are not declaring that special education is unnecessary or has not been effective in educating many students; rather, it is submitted that special education is a part of regular education. Unfortunately, the very label,

"special," has separated the education of children with handicaps from the field of education at large, thus creating a dual system (Stainback and Stainback, 1984). Furthermore, the ease by which students are often referred to special education can also minimize opportunities for regular educators to use skills and techniques which promote the successful return of students with handicaps to their classroom (Walker, 1983). A good starting point for reconciling these differences may be for administrators to promote the position that: (a) all educators in a school are equal members of the staff within that school; (b) all teachers will be actively involved in mainstreaming; (c) regular educators have many teaching skills which can be applied in educating a child with handicaps, and (d) inservice and training programs are to be attended by both regular and special educators.

"But I have 35 children in my classroom". In an age of increasing classroom sizes, it may appear necessary to withhold mainstreaming from a student's program because receiving classrooms are overcrowded. However, classroom size is not acceptable legally as a reason for not mainstreaming. If the size of a receiving classroom were allowed to dictate the most appropriate education for a student with handicaps, the same criteria would have to apply to students without handicaps. In other words, if an existing school had a third grade, with a "maximum" capacity of thirty-four children, but thirty-five children were currently enrolled in the second grade, it would be

necessary to exclude or retain one second grader (regardless of that student's need or progress) or to hire an additional teacher. When applied to non-handicapped students, the solution is clear; students can not be discriminated against by being retained or excluded because the receiving classrooms are inadequate in size or because there are too few teachers for incoming students. Since these guidelines cannot apply to regular education students, they cannot apply to special education students.

The argument of class size is a difficult one for special educators to refute, especially since special education services appear to be better funded than services for regular students, (Deno, 1970). The answers to overcrowding must come from an administrative level through systemic changes. As a first step, administrators must be able to shift funds so that special education monies can be used in the regular classroom for resources, such as hiring aides (Reynolds & Birch, 1982; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Additionally, teachers need to know that the best education is not necessarily one where children have the lowest pupil to teacher ratio. (Were this the case, then homebound tutorial instruction would be the ideal education for most children). For many children with handicaps, the most appropriate educational environment is the regular classroom. The issue of overcrowded schools is of serious concern for all students, but a solution cannot be obtained by denying a subset of students the education which they deserve.

"You go ahead and do it". It is unrealistic to expect a school administrator to know the details of every child's education within a school. However, the cooperative nature of mainstreaming, and the pressures which mainstreaming can place on teacher-teacher relations, demand that a school administrator assume a leadership position or designate a staff member to be responsible for and have authority over: (a) introducing mainstreaming to the staff in a school, (b) stating that mainstreaming will involve all teaching staff, (c) assuring that the mainstreaming process is carefully planned and responsibilities are appropriately distributed, and (d) providing leadership and staff support (Pasanella & Volkmor, 1982; Sharp, 1982b). It must be acknowledged that some administrators are opposed to mainstreaming, are unwilling to assume strong leadership roles, or are poorly equipped to manage the intricacies of mainstreaming. By overlooking or denying their responsibilities to their special education students, these administrators can pose formidable obstacles to education. The issue of administrator preparation and support for mainstreaming is an important topic for further investigation.

Even in cases where administrators are supportive, it may be tempting for the school administrator to delegate the role of leader to the special educator, without also delegating the appropriate authority. The transfer of responsibility without concomitant recognition or support can create serious

difficulties. First, the special educator is placed in an awkward position of asking a colleague to mainstream a student as a favor, when, in fact, mainstreaming is not a teacher courtesy; it is a required response to meet the needs of a child. Also, if the special educator is the sole determinant of which teachers should receive students, favorite colleagues may be repeatedly targeted for mainstreaming, while others are not approached. Such a system does not ensure equity among all teachers, does not maximize the number of mainstream placements which are available, and tends to present mainstreaming as an optional activity. Second, if problems or misunderstandings arise, the special educator without authority cannot decide or implement a course of action. The delicate balance which often exists between regular and special education in many schools cannot afford setbacks resulting from unnecessary human misunderstandings. Third, if such authority is conferred, a formal recognition of the transfer of this responsibility from an administrator to a special educator must be clearly announced. Without clear delineation of responsibilities, a regular educator who needs prompting to conduct certain procedures or who needs technical assistance and support services, cannot be helped effectively by the special educator. Additionally, supervisory responsibilities that are not acknowledged by regular education colleagues could result in the special educator no longer being seen as a colleague who is a

resource for training or assistance, but rather, as an unwelcome intruder into the regular educator's domain.

In summary, special educators can and should be advocates of mainstreaming within a school. However, the advocacy role must not be interpreted by administrators as an opportunity to transfer administrative responsibilities to the special educator unless appropriate compensation, authority and clear definition of roles are also included.

Parental Opposition

Parental opposition to mainstreaming can be one of the biggest obstacles for the special educator to overcome. The mainstreaming-related fears of the parents of children who have handicaps and of parents of children without handicaps are well documented (Quintero, Striefel, Ahooraiyan, and Killoran 1986). These fears include concern over: limited teacher time for addressing the needs of all children, reduction in special services, accessibility, safety, and social adjustment of participating children. To overcome parental opposition requires that a school have a pro-active rather than reactive approach, i.e., continuing parent involvement and an ongoing parent education program concerning the benefits and legal mandates of mainstreaming.

This action is supported by the findings of Turnbull, Winton, Blacher & Salkind (1983) who found that prior to mainstreaming, the majority of parents of children without handicaps in their

sample favored special class (nonintegrated) placement for children with handicaps. However, after their children participated in mainstreamed classrooms, these parents became strong advocates for mainstreaming. Similar findings were reported by Price & Weinberg (1982) and Vincent, Brown and Getz-Sheftel (1981).

Surprisingly, parents of children with handicaps are also uninformed about mainstreaming (Turnbull, et al, 1983). This situation is particularly disturbing when parents are expected to be informed, active participants in decision-making for their child.

Parent opposition can be diminished with accurate information. Brief messages in school newspapers, fliers, and parent meetings can be used to subtly educate parents of children without handicaps about the benefits of mainstreaming. Furthermore, supportive parents can be used to deliver these messages, in a parent-to-parent format, instead of using invited guests or other individuals that may not be viewed by parents as true peers.

Functional Curriculum Training Needs

The special educator is responsible for preparing students for participation in mainstream activities by designing a special education program that develops skills needed for further mainstreaming of each student. In other words, the goals on an IEP should address skills which are necessary in regular

environments such as a regular classroom, a lunchroom, a playground, a bathroom, the hallway, or a home or community setting. However, in order to achieve functionality of goals, special educators may need to observe regular classrooms to determine the social and academic demands placed upon students in those settings (e.g., Striefel, Killoran, & Quintero, 1986, have developed observation systems for use in determining demands). If the special educator does not identify the behaviors that are functional beyond the special education classroom, he/she cannot design IEP's that promote independence in students.

Summary

Mainstreaming is a process that will require changes in order to be implemented effectively. These changes include:

1. A reassessment of the role of special educators from that of direct service providers only, to consultants as well as teachers.

2. Specific training and administrative support to facilitate the assumption and execution of this new role.

3. Incorporation of special and regular education into an integrated, total system of education.

4. Administrative action to assume a leadership role in the mainstreaming process.

5. Recognition that education in a least restrictive environment is mandated by law, and that an appropriate education

for children with handicaps requires that they participate in the mainstream.

6. Training about, and/or involvement in mainstreaming, for all staff and parents.

7. The acknowledgement of mainstreaming as an on-going process in the education of children with handicaps.

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